**The Graphic Novel**

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**Quick Overview:**

In this course, we will explore graphic novels as literature, examining plot, characters, themes, style, and literary techniques that are found within each novel. After carefully examining and discussing plot, themes, style, and literary techniques, you will be assigned several different papers throughout the semester: one will focus on the historical aspects of different genres of graphic novels or the history of the graphic novel itself; another that will compare and contrast similar thematic and/or literary elements found within several graphic novels read within that unit; and a third that will explore the various forms and format of the graphic novel and then make a case on how a certain form (i.e., the hero story, the film noir story, the mainstream eastern graphic novel or the mainstream western graphic novel) is used to create a certain type of story, theme, and presentation for the reader. A fourth major assignment will be assigned in which you will present a graphic novel of your choosing (with my approval) by utilizing a multimedia format (such as a vodcast/podcast) for the purpose of teaching plot, characters, themes, and literary techniques found in that novel as well as a short review on the novel itself. In fact, these presentations will be linked to the Topeka West website AND the Topeka Shawnee County Public Library website within their Young Adult Literature!

**Course Textbooks:**

*Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* by Art Spiegelman

*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi

*The Road to Perdition* by Max Allan Collins

*Watchmen* by Alan Moore

*Superman: The Complete History* by Les Daniels

*Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller

*Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* by Scott McCloud

**Attendance/Participation** – It will be quite important for you, the student, to attend class as this class relies heavily on discussion which will lead to a variety of writing assignments. At the beginning of each class period, journals will be assigned that will focus on different aspects of the graphic novels as well as your personal opinions to the content read and discussed. These journal entries will then, in turn, be useful in helping you form your topic and purpose concerning major papers assigned throughout the course. In other words: Show up to class! However, it should be noted that attending class does not necessarily mean that an individual is participating. It will be the expectation of the student to have read assigned readings and be prepared to discuss for the following class period. Failure to do these things will limit the benefits and privileges of the course by focusing on plot, characters, and setting instead of on the more important higher-level thinking discussions on characterization, themes, style, and literary techniques.

**Assignments:** A majority of the grade will be based on the major papers, the creative assignments, the daily work and quizzes/tests over the graphic novels. Attendance/participation will also be graded.

Units within the Course

The required textbook for the class is *Understanding Comics (Graphic Novels)* by Scott McCloud, which focuses on how to read a graphic novel by looking at sequential art, form, content, types of graphic novels, language within graphic novels, the relationship between words and pictures, symbolism through pictures and words, and thematic elements. This novel will be used throughout the course, depending on what type of literary element will be emphasized for each novel discussed.

Unit 1: The Heroes of American Society Unit

* *History of Superman* – The first hero (and main source for future graphic novels); will focus on his history and importance to society through the decades (parallel the mythos of heroes within Greek Mythology)
* *Batman*: *The Dark Knight Returns* – The second important hero of American culture; focus on the fact that this “hero” is a man; the idea of realism within heroes.
* *Watchmen* – the deconstruction of the hero; how would heroes really view the world and how would society view them in return? Would they be able to coexist?

Paper Assignment #1– Research paper on the history of different types of graphic novels, history of the “new mythology of the hero,” history of genres such as manga, realism, heroes, etc. (Minimum of three pages.)

Creative Assignment #1 – Using the key aspects of a hero within Greek/Roman mythology (and that of today’s standard), you will create your own hero and put that hero into action within a narrative. This will be done in groups of 2 or 3 (depending on the number of student in the class) and will be completed throughout this unit.

Unit 2: Realism Unit

* *Maus I* – An innovative look at the Holocaust; real-life story written using various animals to represent various people within Nazi Germany; symbolism found in art panels to support theme
* *Persepolis* – Another autobiographical novel depicting the childhood of one girl during the war between Iran and Iraq – focusing on the “bildungsroman” by using the graphic novel and cross cultural literature to recreate similar themes found in American novels/literature

Major Paper Assignment #2 – Comparison/contrast on the two graphic novels found in this unit by looking at characters, plot, setting, themes, and literary techniques. (Minimum of three pages.)

Creative Assignment #2 – You will prepare one power point media presentation on an influential writer from the graphic novel medium. The purpose of this assignment is to help you and your classmates learn about some of the best authors/artists of graphic novels. These presentations will be completed in class, and you will need to hand in a printed copy of your presentation. (Requirements for the assignment will be given at a later time.)

Unit 3: Fiction into Film

* *Road to Perdition* – A crime noir that deals with revenge, morality, and family loyalty within the umbrella of the “mob.” Uses historical portrayals of Al Capone, Frank Nitti, and Eliot Ness as characters throughout the story – will introduce film noir and historical aspects of organized crime which is discussed in the story.

Major Paper Assignment #3: After viewing and reading all of the graphic novels, choose one of the graphic novels and write on its specific form and format, suggesting how that form and format lends to the narrative itself (Minimum of three pages.)

Creative Assignment #3: ??? ☺

Final - Multimedia Assignment: Choose a graphic novel of your own (with my approval) and create a presentation on that graphic novel, discussing plot, themes, literary techniques, style, and criticisms/reviews that have been written on that graphic novel. (Must be at LEAST three minutes long.) This presentation will then be created as a podcast which will be added to the library website.

Classroom Policies

1. Behavior - It is expected that an atmosphere of mutual respect shall be maintained. Treat others with dignity. Rudeness will not be tolerated. If someone is given permission to speak, you will give him/her your undivided attention. This includes both teacher and student. You will also be expected to act responsibly. Bring your textbooks and appropriate material to class EVERY DAY and turn your assignments in on time.
2. Classroom Regulations – There are several regulations that will be adhered to in this classroom. They are as follows:
   1. No head attire or sunglasses will be worn in classroom (or around campus) unless otherwise directed.
   2. Cell phones will not be seen or heard. Failure to comply will be the loss of the cell phone for the day and will be given to the office.
   3. No electronic devices will be used in class such as iPods, mp3 players, CD players, etc. unless permission is given. Failure to follow this regulation will be the loss of the device for the day and/or year if continual problems occur. You have been warned!
   4. No food allowed. Since I have carpet, I’d like to keep it as clean as possible. I will allow water/Gatorade with some type of lid. This means that cans will NOT be allowed. I will throw cans away and have done so in the past.
   5. YOU MUST WEAR YOUR I.D.’s AROUND YOUR NECK AT ALL TIMES!!! Failure to do so will be a direct trip to your Division.
   6. Make-up tests must be done within one week of the regular test date. Remember: It is your responsibility to see me about making up the test. It is YOUR grade, not mine.
   7. Homework must be turned in on time; otherwise, there will be a loss of credit for each day turned in late. If absent and excused, you are given one class period to make that assignment up without penalty.
   8. Concerning LECTURE or DISCUSSION: During these times in class, I will ask that students remain seated until finished, unless it is an emergency. This includes being extremely sick or other such issues. However, sharpening your pencil or blowing your nose without asking is prohibited.
3. Attendance/Participation

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Class Participation Points** | | | | |
| **Attendance** | **Bring Appropriate Materials** | **Active Participation** | **I.D.** | **Total** |
| 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 |

This participation grade will be given on a daily basis for each student whether he/she is excused or unexcused. Those students that are excused will be able to make up these points through completion of the assignment (daily work and journal entries) given that day. Those students that are unexcused will not be able to make up these points nor will they be given a chance to make up the assignments given that day.